1: Ammar E, I-5 (1951) 1954
MR13 Fellahin MR13
Silwa

THE VILLAGE SETTING

life of the villagers—religion. Next to the mosques in appearance and cleanliness are some of the shops and stores. These must have a minimum standard of building requirements, according to official regulations. On the north side of the village stand the police station the post office and the elementary school. As to the fields, they extend to the west of the railway road up to the Nile bank, where the water-pumping works, established in 1932, stands with its modern buildings and garden and electric light.

It is worth mentioning here that each of the ten villages constituting the administrative unit of Silwa has its own name and is separated from its neighbours, however close these may be, by a recognized boundary, e.g. a high mound, a valley, or a stretch of gravel or sand. Each of these villages (or two villages combined, as in the case of four of the villages) has its mosque and village saint tomb with a cemetery attached to it. In spite of the fact that all the villages attached to Silwa trace their origin to one ancestor, as will be discussed later, their spatial separation is associated with sub-divisions in their kinship relations.

The physical characteristics of the inhabitants of these villages show a considerable degree of homogeneity. With their dark skins and long heads, they seem to conform to the ancient Southern Egyptian type.[1] All the inhabitants of Silwa, however, take great pride in describing themselves as descendants of Arab stock related to the Prophet. They refer to their traditions and customs and even their dress as 'Arabian'. Whether their claim is true or not, the belief is of central importance as one of the cohesive forces in the village community, and it is the means by which the villagers, especially the older generation, distinguish their way of life from that of others.[2]

The rhythm of daily life in Silwa hardly varies. The crack of dawn witnesses the muazzin calling for morning prayers; youths and men, mounted on their donkeys or camels, call on each other to climb the hills to fetch the fertilizer. By sunrise, most men and boys are heading towards the fields with their cattle and tools; and by broad daylight the village seems

[1] A. Batrawi, who has studied the physical anthropology of Egyptians, maintains that there is some justification for the usual division of Egypt into Upper and Lower Regions as far as the cephalic index is concerned. The people of Upper Egypt have longer but narrower heads, and longer fingers, feet and forearms than those of Lower Egypt. His study of the living samples of modern Egyptian population from all over Egypt suggests that they conform more closely to the Ancient Southern type Moreover, the distribution of blood groups in present-day Egypt shows that the mass of the population is very homogeneous and there are no significant differences in this respect between the Moslems and the Copts. 'The Racial History of Egypt, Part II—Relationships of the Ancient and Modern Population of Egypt and Nubia', in *Journal of Anthropological Institute*, Vol. LXXVI, 1946, pp. 131–55.

[2] Arab genealogies must be accepted with great caution The notion of the Arabs as a conquering race, known for their gallantry, honour and power, played effectively on the minds of the indigenous stock of the fellaheen, who showed an earnest desire to be considered members of that race. Many fellaheen have succeeded in linking themselves to an Arab tribe. A. Ammar, *The People of Sharqiya* (Ph.D. thesis, Manchester University), pp. 13–21.

2: Blackman E-5 (1920-1926) 1927
MR13 Fellahin MR13
Upper Egypt

THE FELLĀḤĪN OF UPPER EGYPT

politics and even religion cannot always avoid conforming to lines of ethnic cleavage too closely to prove wholly effective instruments of mutual understanding. Science, on the other hand, is absolutely disinterested in spirit. Its discoveries are for the whole world to enjoy. There can be no rivalry between the nations as regards their respective shares in the creation of knowledge except in so far as it takes the form of honourable competition in the training of sound scholars. The time is doubtless coming when more Egyptians will come forward as investigators duly educated in the critical use of evidence; and they will be welcome.

After all, it is hard to say whether the Egyptians themselves or the rest of the world have more to gain from the study of the age-long history of Egypt and of the no less enduring individuality of its people. The country is self-contained enough, thanks to the geographical barriers that shut in the Nile Valley, to maintain a civilization answering to its own needs. Even physically the Egyptian type breeds true to itself. As often as racial intermixture occurs, the foreign strain would seem to become recessive to the point of extinction. On the other hand, Egypt is situated at the meeting-point of three continents. It presides over the junction of the Western and Eastern water-ways of the Old World. How far its influence has extended, whether by direct or by indirect propagation, at various critical periods of history is a problem, much discussed at the present moment, on which the most distant regions may be able to throw light. Any diffusion of culture, however, tends to fade out toward its circumference, and is only to be fully understood by intensive study at the centre. In the case of Egypt it is possible to grasp the complex nature of the centrifugal force thence set in motion all the more thoroughly because there is literary as well as material evidence at the disposal of the archæologist. Silent monuments, too, often form the only yield of the spade. Even pictures speak at best in riddles. Literature, however, when it came into existence in Egypt or in Mesopotamia could in some measure disclose that ethnic psychology which alone is the key to genuine history.

Nevertheless, the psychic life of a people is but partially and imperfectly reflected in its literature. Just as in the individual the unconscious part of the mind may be supremely determinative of the total character, so in a community the non-literary and

2: Blackman E-5 (1920-1926) 1927
MR13 Fellahin MR13
Upper Egypt

THE FELLĀḤIN OF UPPER EGYPT

CHAPTER I

EGYPTIAN VILLAGES AND THEIR INHABITANTS

THE natural barriers of Egypt (Fig. 1) have enabled the inhabitants, particularly those of the upper country, to live in comparative isolation throughout the whole of their history. On the north side lies the sea, along the east and west sides stretch vast, almost waterless deserts, while to the south ingress by way of the Nile is impeded by a series of cataracts. Their geographical isolation has doubtless been responsible for the characteristic conservatism of the Egyptian peasants. This conservatism is particularly apparent in their religious and social customs and their commoner industries, which, as will be more especially seen in the final chapter, have remained almost, if not entirely, unchanged from Pharaonic times.

The vast solitudes of the deserts are terrifying to the country folk, most of whom, up to the present day, cannot be induced to traverse even the lower fringes of those wastes after sunset (see Fig. 2). Fear of hyenas, and, still more, fear of *ʿafārīt*,[1] forbids any man to venture beyond the cultivation at night. The ordinary peasant, unless he is obliged to remain in the fields either to protect his crops or to watch over his sheep and goats, returns to his village before sunset, remaining there until just before the dawn of the following day.

The deserts have proved themselves valuable defences against invasion, the peoples who conquered the country at different periods of its history having usually entered it from the north-east. These invaders do not seem to have left any very marked impression on the physical aspect of the Upper Egyptians at any rate; most of these still bear a striking facial resemblance to the ancient inhabitants of the land whom we see depicted on the walls of the temples and tomb-chapels and in the portrait-statues of the Old,

[1] See Chapter XIV.

2: Blackman E-5 (1920-1926) 1927
MR13 Fellahin MR13
Upper Egypt

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Middle, and New Kingdoms. What really is beginning to affect the racial purity of the Egyptians is the presence among them of the descendants of negro slaves, who have been imported in large numbers by the Arabs in comparatively recent times. Many of them are now settled in certain of the villages, where they have

FIG. 1. MAP OF EGYPT

married among themselves or with the *fellāḥīn*, the result being that the population of such villages is almost entirely composed of black, or half-black, people. So far as I have observed, this negroid element is particularly marked in the Fayūm and Beni Ṣuēf, and on the edge of the cultivation in Minia and Asyūṭ provinces, where large numbers of Arabs have been settled for several generations.

The influence of the deserts may be seen in Egyptian folk-tales,

3: Ayrout M-5 (ca. 1935) 1945
MR13 Fellahin MR13

CHAPTER V

THE FELLAH AS A PERSON

We have seen that the fellah's work consists entirely of physical labour and brings his whole body into play. Let us now consider the labourer himself, and examine the fellah from the physical point of view, his race, type, clothing, habits and so on. We shall find once again that water, soil and sun are the physical agents which explain and often even determine the physical constitution of the fellah.

Despite this dependence on the material environment, the liberty of the human will introduces an element of variety. But the will in its turn is subject to another factor, conformity to tradition, and this in the end produces the same result — stability.

(1) *Race and Type*

To what race does the modern fellah belong, and what is his genealogy and origin? No final answer has as yet been found to these questions. Nevertheless, any amount research has been done on the subject, and any number of theories, serious or not, evolved to explain the facts.

To go back no further than the eighteenth century, Volney, for example, declares the fellaheen to be of negroid extraction. Vivant Denon suggests a Caucasian origin. Poinsinet de Sivry, following Pliny the Younger, believes them descended from the Celts. Winckelman suggests Chinese immigration as a solution, and Moreau de Jonnes would put the cradle of the Egyptian race as far away as Polynesia.

Ethnologists of the late nineteenth century, with more knowledge and plausibility, sought a key to the problem nearer Egypt, either in Africa or in Asia.

The theory of African origin is upheld by Hartmann, and later by Flinders Petrie and Maspero, who class the Egyptians with the Ethiopians. Chantre, after anthropo-

144 metric research covering thousands of types both past and
174 present, concludes that the Egyptians, although not absolutely native to their present soil, are essentially Africans, of Libyan extraction, and that if there was any Asiatic infiltration, it had no influence on the race. (34)

Schweinfurth, relying on botanical evidence, believes Southern Arabia to be the source of the Egyptian race, while Amelineau, de Rougé, and (more authoritatively) J. de Morgan, who supports his theory by the comparative study of language, art, customs and physical characteristics, consider Chaldea to be a more likely source. (35)

The theory now in favour, because it is less simple, may be nearer the truth. It can be summed up thus: — In prehistoric times Asiatic invaders, perhaps Arabs or Babylonians, conquered the Nile Valley, and intermingled as the predominant race with people already established there, a composite stock of natives and Ethiopians.

This theory is a synthesis of the two earlier hypotheses, and has the advantage of taking into account facts which support both of them while allowing of the inclusion of the Egyptians in the family of *homo mediterraneus*, a compound of Semitic and Hamitic stocks which peoples North Africa, a great part of Hither Asia, and the shores of the Mediterranean, and shows, where it borders on the black races, certain affinities with the Ethiopians.

The study of profiles in ancient frescoes, and of skeletons discovered in a variety of excavations, obliges us none the less to recognise three original types: the Semites, long-skulled and of medium height; the Mediterraneans, short-skulled, with a short, straight nose; the Libyans, snub-nosed and short-skulled. But the climate and agricultural life have worn away these differences between indigenous and foreign elements and created a specifically Egyptian stock which is no less indivisible than the Nile Valley itself.

174 However all this may be, and although we may not
175 know precisely where the Ancient Egyptians came from, we can be quite sure that the present inhabitants of the country — or at least the fellaheen, and it is with them that we are concerned — are descended from the Egyptians of dynastic times, with whom they are linked without a break and almost without intermixture, despite the passage of fifty centuries and conquest after conquest from abroad.

The conditions of servitude and contempt in which the native population has been held by foreign conquerors since the decline of the Pharaohs have had the effect of preserving the race. Persians, Greeks, Romans, Arabs, Turks, French and English have in this matter all followed the same policy. They have laid hold on the riches of Egypt, and taken power in order to do so, but have neither associated with nor supplanted the fellaheen who produce the wealth. Egypt has always been too densely populated to be suitable for colonial expansion. The conquerors have never been numerous enough to modify the race of the conquered. Their manner of life has always been different, and contact with them has only aroused antagonism. 174 175

There has, however, been some penetration of nomads and negroes from near areas. After the Moslem conquest in the seventh century a number of Arabs settled in Egypt, not only in the towns but also in the countryside. As conquerors they were able to impose on the native inhabitants their language, their religion, some of their customs with regard to women, and their cruelty in vengeance. In spite of this the original inhabitants, a hundred times more numerous, especially in the countryside, with women stronger and more fertile, and a manner of life so persistent and unchanging, have marked the Arab elements with their own stamp. In establishing themselves on the black soil the Arabs adopted the traditions of those who ploughed it. This is still noticeable even today in the villages of the Upper Delta, where on account of the richness of the soil Arab immigration was heavier, and in hamlets recently settled on the edge of the desert. After three or four generations the scion can no longer be distinguished from the stock, or else it has proved too dissimilar to take the graft. Assimilation to type is in fact consequent upon assimilation of the fellah way of life. The Arabs who have remained nomadic, and live by the transport of cotton on camel-back, by pasturing flocks, or by robbery and murder,—those in fact known in Egypt as Bedouin,—differ markedly from the fellaheen by their finer features and their more excitable temperament.

Another fusion has taken place in the south, between fellaheen and negroes. Here, the two elements being more dissimilar, the mixture is more noticeable, but the Egyptian 174 174 175

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144 type is dominant, and the other recessive. This absorption
174 of neighbouring and therefore not unnaturally somewhat
175 similar elements by a settled people of greater vigour and numbers seems a logical process. Had the invaders or immigrants arrived in millions, had they come from Germany or the Balkans, they might perhaps have imposed their own type, despite the influence of climate and way of living. But the deserts on East and West, the depth inland to the South, and the unusual character of the Nile Valley, as well as the density of the original population, have kept the country free from all mass immigrations.

Thus both geographical and historical factors have conspired to preserve the Egyptian type. The country population especially retains a facial appearance distinguishing it among the countless mixtures of the Near East.

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144 It has been said that the Copts are the purest representa-
779 tives of the ancient stock. This is true in the towns,
186 where the Copts are usually the original inhabitants, while the Moslems are for the most part descended from Arabs and Turks, and have married women from any and every country. Racial and physical differences are here very clear. In the country, however, this theory does not fit the facts. The fellaheen who have remained Christian and those who have become Moslems are of one and the same origin. If the former for religious reasons marry only with Christians and have thus kept the race pure, tradition has made the latter no less exclusive. The antipathy between fellaheen and Bedouin makes marriages between them extremely rare, and any union with a foreigner who may chance to live in the village is considered scandalous in the extreme.

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142 Thus it is possible, in describing the type, to generalise without appreciable error.

The fellah is a heavily built man, though not stout. His skull and face are broad, his forehead narrow, his eyes and hair dark. He has rather prominent cheekbones, a thick nose, full but not protruding lips, and a heavy jaw. His features on the whole are rugged but not ill-favoured, and are neither very sensitive nor very expressive. His thick wrists, ankles and neck distinguish him from the supple Bedouin. His back is rounded, his shoulders not so much sloping as bent in towards the chest, and his hips narrow.